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ABSTRACT

More than half of all public school pupils in New York State are enrolled in city systems. Moreover, if a child is educationally, physically, mentally, or emotionally handicapped, the odds are three out of five that he is in one of the five largest city school systems. If a child's family is on welfare, or black, or Spanish speaking, the odds rise to four or five. The author traces the historical development of the State's role in urban education and makes suggestions for its future role. He urges increased State support for urban schools, outlines the manner in which that support should be given, and suggests a metropolitan organizational structure to handle urban educational needs. (Author/JF)

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THE EMERGING STATE ROLE IN URBAN EDUCATION

or

Cities Are No Longer "Pie for the Hayseeds"

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THE EMERGING STATE ROLE IN URBAN EDUCATION

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As Commissioner of Education, I have consistently maintained that the New York State Education Department must become increasingly urban-oriented. More than half of all public school pupils in New York State are enrolled in city systems. Two out of five are concentrated in our five largest cities alone. Moreover, if a child is educationally, physically, mentally or emotionally handicapped, the odds are three out of five that he is in one of the "big five" school systems. If the child's family is on welfare, or black, or Spanish-speaking, the odds rise to four out of five.

As you well know, programs to meet the needs of these children are especially costly. However, the boards of education in these five cities are the only ones in the State that lack the authority to levy taxes. They must share receipts with their city administrations. And nonschool services in these five cities preempt as much as 75 cents of each property tax dollar.

It is my strong conviction that the ultimate test of our universal system of education is how well it provides for those whose needs are greatest, those who stand peripherally at its margins. I mean, for example, those handicapped by poverty, prejudice, physical limitations, language barriers, and cultural deprivation. I am sure, too, that black

children and poor children can learn without the presence of white children or wealthier children. But I am equally certain that neither black nor white children, rich children nor poor children, will learn to live together in a multi-racial, multi-cultural world unless they attend school together. They must learn early in life that similarities between people are greater than differences, and that difference is a source of richness and value, not something to be feared or denied.

Schools in our urban ghettos will continue to be less adequate than those elsewhere as long as they remain undersupported and unable to attract and retain good teachers, counselors, and administrators. These schools must be transformed so that they, no less than suburban or rural schools, become places in which children will experience joy and wonder in learning, pleasure in creating, and a heightened sense of their own dignity as human beings. To accomplish this, we must begin by acknowledging that educational failure is too often a failure on the part of those who are responsible for the schools, rather than the children in the schools. The public and its representatives must come to understand that the price of education is more of an investment than a cost, and that the cost of education in any case is cheaper than the cost of ignorance. The uneducated become isolated and alienated, and no society can afford the tragic loss of human potential.

Effective state leadership has been the exception and not the norm, however, when educational and social problems cripple major urban centers.

In New York State, as in other parts of the country, the State Education Department has only recently begun to play a major role in the tangled affairs of big-city school systems. Traditionally, the Department and the urban districts found advantages in a policy of arms-length coexistence in which each thought it could live and let live. But events of the last few decades, especially during the 1960's, created an urban crisis of such magnitude that the cities can no longer resolve their problems alone. A new kind of urban-state relationship must be created in the interest of all the people.

This new relationship will depend partly on conditions particular to each state. What we are doing to improve the quality of urban school systems in New York State, for example, could not be undertaken without reference to historical, social, and political forces which did not come together in quite the same way anywhere else. However, I believe that an examination of our experience also suggests reasons for which all states today must commit more time and resources to the problems of their cities, too.

Dutch settlers established the first schools in what was to become New York State during the 1630's, or approximately 150 years before the Board of Regents was created. During the Colonial period and into the early years of the Republic, as Theodore Reller has written,

> the state generally did not enter into the educational picture vigorously but passed enabling legislation and

> was satisfied to encourage in some small measure the local communities to develop the educational program and services which they thought desirable.[1]

There was, of course, little need for state education agencies at a time when few children attended school or required much formal education for life on farms or in small shops.

After the American Revolution, however, there was a conviction among leaders like Governor Clinton in New York and Thomas Jefferson in Virginia that public education, even if only for a few years, was indispensable to enable the people to govern themselves wisely and be effective guardians of their newly won liberty.

In 1784, the New York Legislature passed two important laws providing for educational opportunity. One was the act creating The University of the State of New York, which was to become the unified system within which a diversified mix of locally administered educational institutions would flourish. This act also incorporated the Board of Regents, whose original functions included the supervision of schools and colleges. The second act set aside land for the use of public schools in each township.

In the ensuing years, the Regents championed the cause of common schools. As a committee of the Regents said in 1787, the creation of public schools "ought not to be left to the discretion of private men, but be promoted by public authority."[2] In 1805, the Legislature provided for New York's first permanent school fund to assist local districts and, in one of

several ironic twists, inadvertently set the stage for overlapping dual control of the State's overall educational system which was to continue into the early part of this century.

The division of authority occurred because no provision was made in the 1805 law for distribution of the funds. When the first payments were to be made in 1812, another statute was enacted which created a state superintendent of common schools, the first such office in America, and the superintendent was assigned specific duties, among them

> to digest and prepare plans for the improvement and management of the common school fund, and for the better organization of the common schools; to prepare and report estimates of the school monies; to superintend the collection thereof; to apportion the monies to be distributed for the support of common schools. . .[3]

No change was made in the previously enacted general powers of the Regents, however, so that they were still authorized "to visit and inspect" all the colleges, academies, and schools.

The first superintendent of common schools was Gideon Hawley, who sought to perfect a plan of "indirect" supervision of the schools, as well as to apportion State funds. But Hawley's energetic efforts were not appreciated in many localities. In what today might be likened to the "Saturday night massacre" that included the firing of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, Hawley was ousted in 1821, his office was abolished, and the superintendent's duties were assigned to New York's Secretary of State.

The destinies of the emerging common schools remained in the hands of Secretaries of State, rather than professional school administrators, until 1854. At that time, the Legislature responded to growing pressure and created the Department of Public Instruction headed by a superintendent who was required

> to visit, as often as may be practicable, such and so many of the common schools, academies and other literary institutions of the state as he may deem expedient; to inquire into the course of instruction, management and discipline of such institutions, and to report the results of such visitation and inspection annually to the Legislature, with such recommendations as he may deem suitable.[4]

Thus, the overlapping of functions between the Regents and the State's chief school officer was perpetuated by law for another half century, until the passage of the Unification Act of 1904. This act abolished the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Executive Secretary of the Regents, providing instead for the first Commissioner of Education who would perform functions previously assigned to both, act as the executive officer of the Regents, and thus put an end to embarrassing duplications of reports, inspections and other activities. The 1904 statute, in combination with subsequent revisions of the Education Law, moved the State beyond traditional record-keeping and regulatory functions and toward creative service and constructive change.

By this time, however, some urban schools, including those in New York City, had already undergone their first major "reform" without

significant state involvement. This was the reorganization movement of the late 19th century, led by the urban upper class and professional élite along with some university faculty, muckrakers and others who were determined to wrest control of basically "uncentralized" schools from patronage-minded politicians.

Big-city school systems had evolved during the 19th century on a district or ward basis described by Joseph Cronin in this way:

> Laymen ran the schools the way they wanted to run them, delegating to schoolmen only the more esoteric problems of curriculum and supervision. Most personnel, maintenance, and business matters were handled by lay boards without professional consultation. The school superintendency as a role appeared late, grew slowly, and for most of the nineteenth century bore little resemblance to the contemporary version.[5]

This arrangement enabled leaders of the new immigrant masses to provide teaching and other jobs for their friends, followers and relatives, and to preserve the old religious and national identities. It was also a system which, according to outraged critics, resulted in an intolerably inferior education for children.

One of the muckraking critics of the urban schools was Joseph Mayer Rice, who observed classroom teaching in 33 cities, including New York City and Buffalo, and reported his findings in magazine articles published in 1892 and 1893. Rice's general conclusion about late 19th century urban schools was pretty well summed up as follows:

> It is indeed incomprehensible that so many loving mothers whose greatest care appears to be the welfare of their children are willing, without hesitation, to resign the fate of their little ones to the tender mercies of ward politicians, who in many instances have no scruples in placing the children in classrooms the atmosphere of which is not fit for human beings to breathe, and in charge of teachers who treat them with a degree of severity that borders on barbarism.[6]

In New York City, Rice described one school as "the most dehumanizing institution that I have ever laid eyes on," a school in which every child was treated as if he possessed only "a memory and the faculty of speech but no individuality, no sensibilities, no soul." He declared that conditions in Buffalo were equally deplorable and identified the three major causes as "politics, untrained teachers, and scanty supervision."[7]

The solution to these problems, the reformers argued, was to centralize the schools through boards of election selected on a citywide basis, rather than within the wards, and to create a professional bureaucracy insulated from the local politicians.

According to Cronin:

> In one sense, the reformers succeeded too well. City schools became so insulated from politics that in the 1960's they responded with great reluctance to the claims of urban minorities for quality, integrated education or for a share of the teaching and administrative jobs.[8]

Despite the supposed professionalism achieved by both city school systems and the State Education Department, however, rivalry kept them

apart as often as not. Professional jealousy, in fact, was part of the problem. Cities, as Roald Campbell has noted, were the forerunners in education, and their leaders saw little reason to seek help from the state.[9] State education agencies, meanwhile, tended to draw their staffs from rural schools and, therefore, were more at ease in dealing with such schools.

In a representative report of the time, Charles Skinner, one of New York's State Superintendents of Public Instruction, described the 1895-96 school year as "a wonderful story of great resources and great possibilities." He quickly added, however:

> Notwithstanding the apparent advance in the general school work of the State, thoughtful educators view with apprehension the failure of the rural schools to keep in touch with the onward movement of those more fortunately located in our cities and villages. Students of educational problems thoroughly appreciate that in view of the constant tendency of our population and wealth toward the cities and villages, the rural school problem has become the one most worthy of attention and most perplexing in its solution.[10]

In the cities, meanwhile, political leaders like Tammany boss George Washington Plunkitt continued to rail against urban reformers and the Upstate Republicans who dominated the State Legislature.

The new civil service law, Plunkitt lamented bitterly,

> is the biggest fraud of the age. It is the curse of the nation. There can't be no real patriotism while it lasts. How are you goin' to interest our young men in their country if you have no offices to give them when they work for their party?[11]

Plunkitt was even more dyspeptic when he got into the subject of how rural lawmakers financed State programs at the expense of property-rich New York City.

He complained,

> This city is ruled entirely by the hayseed legislators at Albany. I've never known an Upstate Republican who didn't want to run things here, and I've met many thousands of them in my long service in the Legislature. The hayseeds think we are like the Indians to the National Government--that is, sort of wards of the State, who don't know how to look after ourselves and have to be taken care of by the Republicans of St. Lawrence, Ontario, and other backwoods counties. Why should anybody be surprised because ex-Governor Odell comes down here to direct the Republican machine? Newburgh ain't big enough for him. He, like all the other Upstate Republicans, wants to get hold of New York City. New York is their pie.[12]

In 1914, however, a request for State expertise was made by the Superintendent of Schools in Buffalo. Superintendent Henry Emerson wrote to State Education Commissioner John Finley to advise Finley that the city wanted to create "the most modern and acceptable organization" of its public school system.

Emerson's letter continued,

> I understand that the State Education Department has, from time to time, made an examination of the school systems of other cities, and I am, therefore, requesting your Department to make a thorough and complete examination of the legal organization, methods of administration, and all other facts bearing upon the effectiveness of our school system, that our citizens may know what defects, if any, exist, and what legislative action, if any, should be undertaken in reference thereto.[13]

Finley's staff came up with a long list of "defects" and made many recommendations, the most striking being that Buffalo must provide for "an absolute divorcement of all school affairs from the municipal and Political affairs of the city." In 1917, a State law was enacted which reorganized Buffalo's schools considerably.

Despite this development and several Department-initiated actions aimed at correcting city school problems, the emphasis at the State level into World War II continued to be on rural education, especially what to do about inefficient, one-room country schools. The solution, it was decided, was to consolidate small school districts so that they would have larger enrollments, a wider range of programs and specialized services, and reasonable tax rates. In short, the rural schools were to be made more like the urban schools.

Cities, however, were entering a period of change that would create radically different conditions in their school systems. With comparatively little construction of either new housing or new schools since the 1930's, there were growing signs of physical decay. As cities became less appealing to live in, many people who could do so got out. This was especially the case among World War II veterans who took advantage of GI benefits like low-cost home financing to move their families to the suburbs. Declining urban neighborhoods, meanwhile, provided the only possible shelter for growing numbers of unskilled and economically handicapped people who

had been displaced by declining job opportunities, largely in agricultural employment.

The postwar influx of blacks and Puerto Ricans, in particular, led to growing concentrations of minority groups who, as strangers to a complex urban environment, could not find the levers of political or bureaucratic power. They were blocked from full participation in the social, political, economic, and educational life of the cities, and they developed a growing distrust of the established order and its institutions, including schools that seemed unresponsive to their needs.

What Plunkitt had described earlier in the century as "pie for the hayseeds"--the supposedly vast wealth of the cities--could no longer fill the needs of even city dwellers alone who required ever-expanding municipal services of all kinds.

Schools became increasingly overcrowded. Buildings were in grave disrepair. There were too few textbooks, too few supplies, too few teachers, and too few classrooms. Moreover, there was such a high turnover rate in ghetto schools that, even if programs were effective, children gained little from them because they had so little sustained exposure to them.

Inevitably, the State and Federal governments had to do something.

In New York State, it was the 1954 Supreme Court decision in the Brown case that really turned us around. While segregation did not exist in a legal sense, it was readily apparent that, de facto, individual schools within systems were far from integrated.

As we began to focus our attention on the large urban areas, we became increasingly aware that even New York City, probably the most integrated school system anywhere in terms of the diversity of the total school population, had too heavy concentrations of black or Puerto Rican pupils in individual schools. And these pupils too often experience unacceptably low scholastic achievement.

Moreover, the staffs tended to be relatively inexperienced, underprepared, reluctant teachers in the schools where the need was for the very best.

In 1961, the Board of Regents adopted and announced a statement of policy that was to guide future Department actions in relation to the cities in particular. The policy statement included this important paragraph:

> The State of New York has long held to the principle that equal opportunity for all children, without regard to differences in economic, national, religious, or racial background, is a manifestation of the vitality of our American democratic society and is essential to its continuation. Subsequent events have repeatedly given it moral reaffirmation. Nevertheless, all citizens have the responsibility to re-examine the schools within their local systems in order to determine whether they conform to this standard so clearly seen to be the right of every child.

A year later, a racial census of the elementary schools was conducted. This report identified a number of districts in which the ratio of black to white pupils was relatively high. Since racial imbalance is regarded as likely to interfere with the achievement of educational opportunity,

the Department urged school districts to develop plans to achieve racial balance in their schools.

In 1963, my immediate predecessor, Commissioner Allen, requested that districts in which racial imbalance existed submit a report on progress made in eliminating racial imbalance, what further action was planned, and estimates of additional costs of such actions. This led to legislative appropriations totaling $13,000,000 between 1966 and 1971 to assist districts in meeting the extra costs in correcting racial imbalance.

The report of the State Education Commissioner's Advisory Committee on Human Relations and Community Tensions of New York City, which was presented in 1964, revealed both the extent and complexity of the problem of eliminating de facto segregation in the New York City school system. This report recognized integration as part of the larger issue of improving the schools and saw in the need for dealing with integration an opportunity and challenge for raising the quality of the entire school system.

The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 focused attention on the educationally poor and economically disadvantaged to a degree which had never previously existed. Tests administered statewide as part of our Pupil Evaluation Program to every child in the 1st, 3rd, 6th, and 9th grades in all public, parochial, and private schools revealed heavy concentrations of pupils with low achievement in the large urban areas.

Only the most pessimistic of us would have predicted the concentration of low achievement that the test results indicated.

In 1967, the Board of Regents issued the first of a series of position papers, entitled Urban Education. It was both a statement of policy and of proposed action. The paper began in this way:

> The major problem of education in New York State today lies in our cities. The recent series of riots, boycotts and strikes have forced us to realize that no excuse can justify delay of a concerted effort to reform urban education. No task is more difficult or essential; no issue forces us more seriously to adjust traditional policy and practice to new thought and action.

With this in mind, the Regents directed the State Education Department to develop a strategy for the revitalization of urban school systems.

The major outcome of this effort was the action by the 1968 State Legislature appropriating $52,000,000 annually for a program aimed at making it possible for urban schools to offer a program to city children equivalent in quality to that available in neighboring suburbs. This action by the Legislature was a landmark as a first direct step by the State to improve urban education. It also made possible projects designed to strengthen and extend the regular school programs' ability to meet educational needs of economically disadvantaged children, particularly in the areas of reading, mathematics, and bilingual education. These projects provide a means to place State aid at the point of greatest educational need and to coordinate local, State and Federal planning in the interest of the most effective use of funds.

This program of special aid for urban education is currently in its fifth year of operation, although annual funding has been reduced to $47,000,000. New York City, with by far the largest concentration of the pupils for whom the urban education program was designed, has naturally received the major share of the funds allocated.

Forgetting for the moment the magnitude and complexity of the factors initially responsible for the urban education effort, it would not be unreasonable to expect great advances to have been made by now with the special State Urban Education assistance on top of, or along with, Federal ESEA funds, the regular State aid, and local funds. I would hesitate to claim that great advances have taken place in the educational achievements of the youngsters for whose benefit these expenditures were made. But an evaluation report of recent years' efforts is heartening, indeed, in showing gains in basic skills and understandings and the values of prekindergarten education.

Certainly, we are now more fully aware of the complexity and magnitude of the factors cited in the initial position paper of the Regents as comprising the main elements of the urban education problem. We have probably learned most about the web of problems related to the size and complexity of the New York City school system.

The idea that the New York City system was unmanageably large and complex was not a new idea that emerged in the mid-1960's. It is just

that this was about the point in time at which a consensus developed in support of that judgment. But while there was a general consensus on the need to come to grips with that problem, there was little agreement on how to solve it.

What resulted from a swirling controversy was the 1969 decentralization law. This statute was, as is so often the case with the most important legislation, a patchwork job including many political compromises. Among other things, it did not fully conform with what I think decentralization is really all about--that is, the mournful task of making little ones out of big ones. The fact is that each of the present 32 "community" school boards is the equivalent of a major city.

It is well to remember, however, that the decentralization law was passed during the 1968-69 school year, a year I hope will never be matched for its turmoil in the New York City school system. The focus of the turmoil was the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experimental school district, over which the State placed a trusteeship, and the nine-week-long teachers' strike. However, the issues involved went far beyond the eight Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools.

Parenthetically, during the trusteeship, many members of the State Education Department had an unexpected and exceptional opportunity to know and experience directly the pupils, staffs and problems of a thoroughly disadvantaged neighborhood and the interlocking complexity of a large city

school system. Many of those directly involved will never again see the so-called "disadvantaged" child of the ghetto as a stereotyped and vague abstraction. It was a liberating emotional experience.

During the debate leading up to the passage of the decentralization law, almost every organized group of any kind that could conceivably have a direct or indirect interest in education in the New York City schools was involved. This included the Regents, who submitted their own decentralization plan based on their faith in the concept of the governance of education at the community level by lay boards of education.

Although we were disappointed that the more thoroughgoing decentralization plan envisioned in the Regents proposals was not enacted, we made it clear that the State Education Department would devote its "full resources and unqualified efforts" to help fulfill the objectives of the new law.

In 1970, after I had become Commissioner, I appointed a task force to help New York City attain the ultimate purpose of decentralization--raising educational achievement to the highest possible level. The goal of the task force, under the leadership of a member of the Department's Division of School Supervision, was to provide closer and more continuous liaison between education officials and community leaders in the city during the period of transition. In addition, I arranged for seven different units within the Department to provide specialized assistance in their particular fields of expertise: curriculum and instruction, business affairs, personnel,

community relations, and school plant construction and maintenance. Each task force member was assigned a set of community districts for which he became a key contact. Close touch was also maintained with the chief executive officer of the New York City school system, Chancellor Harvey Scribner, and with the central Board of Education.

Also in 1970, a major change was made in the law which provided that the local districts were to be governed by locally elected, rather than appointed, community boards empowered to name their own superintendents to serve under contract to them. This law called for the first elections to be held in the spring of that year, with board members to begin their three-year terms on July 1, 1970. Department staff worked with city authorities to help prepare for the elections and to orient the new board members to their jobs.

This year, unfortunately, there were widespread reports of irregularities and deficiencies in the election and registration process for last spring's voting. These reports indicated that the system is seriously inadequate and that changes in the law and the procedures may be necessary.

As a result of this situation, I ordered an intensive study of the 1973 community school board elections and designated a distinguished former member of the Board of Regents and former President of the New York City School Board, Max Rubin, to conduct the study. As of mid-October, a total of 54 persons had presented their views at a series of public hearings, and

Mr. Rubin has given his assurance that he will provide for anyone who could contribute to the study to be hea . We expect a final report in time for consideration by the 1974 Legislature.

Meanwhile, a growing number of urban programs and projects are being undertaken by Department personnel in New York and other cities to improve the quality of educational programs, to diversify learning options, and to upgrade management practices.

The Office of Urban School Services, an outgrowth of the task force created to assist in the transition to decentralization, is now operating in New York City on a full-time basis. Sixteen professional positions were reassigned from Albany to New York so that more concerted help could be provided to the community districts, special schools, and central Board. A budget of $250,000 supports the office. Office staff spend an average of one day per week in each district and other assignment areas. They are presently concentrating their efforts on improvement of attendance, alternative education programs, and personnel accounting systems. In addition, Department and Board personnel are working jointly toward development of a plan that will lead to improved fiscal management throughout the decentralized districts. A coordinator of Department services to the City was named earlier this year. His previous experience includes four years as an administrator in the Baltimore City public schools.

In addition, Department staff members from Title I ESEA, Urban Education, Reading, Vocational Education, and Drug and Health Education

are also located full-time in New York City, and staff in some of these areas have established local offices in Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse.

In a related development, a special Basic Skills Task Force was created last March when the results of the 1972 achievement tests showed a continuing decline in reading proficiency among New York City pupils. The task force made a concentrated study of one of the community districts with the lowest scores, District 14 in Brooklyn. The 34 task force members included specialists in various instructional fields who visited the district schools regularly for five successive weeks. The data are now available in a comprehensive report which will be the basis for recommendations to be implemented in District 14 and other areas where pupils are not now learning the basic skills adequately.

Last month, 15 school districts in different parts of the State were awarded a total of $1,500,000 in funding for bilingual education projects. These were the first districts to receive such awards under a bill passed by the 1973 Legislature. The grants are intended to help the districts meet the special educational needs of non-English-speaking pupils, or pupils whose English is limited, by incorporating bilingual education into the overall education system. The Regents had identified bilingual education as one of their major concerns in a 1972 position paper which noted that an estimated 300,000 pupils in this State are categorized as non-English-speaking.

Said the Regents in that paper:

> A fundamental tenet of bilingual education is that a person living in a society whose language and culture differ from his own must be equipped to participate meaningfully in the mainstream of that society. It should not be necessary for him to sacrifice his native language and culture to achieve such participation. Rather, we should utilize available language skills and thought processes to foster intellectual development while developing English language proficiency.

The Department is also seeking to make educational reform more uniform in urban schools, as well as in schools outside the cities. One of our most important programs in this connection is Project Redesign, which seeks to achieve systematic educational review and reform through community-wide involvement.

One of the four prototype districts in Project Redesign is District 7 in the South Bronx of New York City, which has created an alternative junior high school specifically to serve the educational needs of children who do not meet conventional standards for admission to a city high school. This special school opened last February with an enrollment of 250 students. The organizational structure and instructional components resulted from collaborative planning among many persons, including principals, teachers, union representatives, and school district residents.

The community has been brought into the decision-making process in a variety of ways. For example, 42 community groups, including a youth gang, were involved in the basic decision whether District 7 would participate as a Redesign prototype. Later, approximately 600 parents

and other district residents contributed to the selection of a school superintendent once the field had been narrowed to the top three candidates.

Finally, I would suggest that a comprehensive program to meet the needs of city schools should include new educational structures that would encompass an entire metropolitan region.

Metropolitanism merits special attention because the full range of educational needs of people in both the central city and surrounding areas cannot be met within the confines of either area alone. Too often, the sole focus of discussion of metropolitanism in education is on the movement of students from one district to another, usually for the purpose of ending segregation. This gives metropolitanism too narrow a range. Rather than focus on the movement of students, discussion of metropolitanism should more properly center on the potential of sharing services and broadening the financial base for the support of all educational resources within a region. The districts in a designated metropolitan region might, for example, join together to provide services to member districts and, under some circumstances, directly to people within the region.

We have already developed a shared-services approach along these lines, BOCES (Boards of Cooperative Educational Services). BOCES were developed initially primarily to meet the needs of small, poor rural districts. In recent years, these units have become helpful to suburban districts wishing to expand services beyond their own capacity. And now

BOCES offer the potential for further development to meet the problems of metropolitan areas.

Let me conclude with just a few general observations about the emerging state role in urban education.

The State's first function is to set performance standards. Minimum levels of accomplishment are essential for any individual in order that he may avail himself of the full richness of opportunities that any changing society offers. We can no longer afford simply to offer opportunities. The educational system must take responsibility for guaranteeing that each member of society will be given all the help he may need to become a self-sustaining learner. There is a job to be done to determine in precise terms what that means and then to determine what it will take in each person's case to reach the expected level of performance.

When these minimum standards have been developed and agreed to between the State and the localities, the State's responsibility is to see to it that each school district brings every individual to the expected level of performance, and to help the schools in going beyond those minimums, too. The State will have to help the districts create attractive learning opportunities that reflect the wide-ranging needs and aspirations of the full population, and it must find ways to do this through expenditures of time, money, and resources that are acceptable to the districts.

The State must also help each district develop processes for making the transition from present practices to the new arrangements with a

minimum of disruption and disorder and with a maximum preservation of all that is good in the existing arrangements, even as new arrangements are introduced.

We are beginning to move toward these objectives through some of our recently created urban education programs. But much more remains to be accomplished. So, in conclusion, I would add that no reform strategies for city schools will be any better than the leadership behind them. All too often, well-meaning innovators, especially when they face the enormously complex problems of the cities, experience The Impotence of Being Earnest. We need leaders at the State level and in the urban school systems who can work together, who can define and systematically solve problems, who can live with ambiguity and temporary systems in a day of ad hocracy, who know when to surface and use conflict creatively, and who are mission- and problem-oriented as well as urban-oriented. The task of improving urban schools and the quality of life in our cities is worth our very best efforts.

EBN 11/13/73

FOOTNOTES

1. Theodore L. Reller, The Administration of Public Education (New York, The Ronald Press Company, 1952), p. 75.

2. Wayne W. Soper, Development of State Support of Education in New York State, (Albany, The University of the State of New York Press, Bulletin No. 1019, 1933), pp. 16-17.

3. Ibid, p. 23.

4. Ibid, p. 29.

5. Joseph M. Cronin, The Control of Urban Schools, (New York, Free Press, 1973), pp. 9-10.

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